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Jay Schiefelbein
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Re: Comment on the Draft EIS for proposed Kohler Golf Course, Town of Wilson, Sheboygan County

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the above-referenced project. Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA) is dedicated to the protection, restoration, and enjoyment of wetlands and associated ecosystems through science-based programs, education, and advocacy.

While it is rare for us to weigh in on project-specific proposals, we do so in cases where the proposed project poses a threat to rare or exceptionally high quality wetland resources or when the decision will establish a precedent for how the state implements existing wetland protection laws. We chose to respond to this project because it has the potential to do both.

The interdunal and ridge-swale wetlands located on the proposed development site are rare, with only 10 known examples in Wisconsin and small acreages present at each site. This, combined with the fact that these wetlands developed over hundreds if not thousands of years, in response to unique lake shore conditions, suggests that they are not a type of wetland that can be re-established elsewhere through mitigation.

The DEIS is largely silent to the fact that the proposed and potential direct, indirect, secondary, and cumulative impacts will degrade or destroy wetlands that are essentially irreplaceable. As described in more detail below, this is one of several significant deficiencies in the content of the document.

We offer the following comments and recommendations on the content, findings, and adequacy of the DEIS:

1. The DEIS fails to disclose critical project details that are relevant to the assessment of environmental risks and impacts.

The DEIS presents a conceptual overview of the proposed project, but lacks the level of detail needed to adequately evaluate and disclose environmental concerns. Examples of missing project details that have the potential to affect site topography, hydrology, and wetland function include but are not limited to:

- a. the dimensions and locations of cart paths;

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- b. whether or where excavation of Adrian muck and Granby soils will be needed;
- c. the extent and location of all proposed grading, particularly grading of dunes and wetlands;
- d. details on the location and operation of non-irrigation wells;
- e. details on the extent and location of tree clearing.

2. The DEIS fails to include basic analyses of environmental concerns.

While the incomplete site plan makes it difficult to evaluate the full extent of direct and potential impacts to wetlands and other sensitive resources, it also failed to ask, let alone assess, fundamental questions on the likely and potential impacts from project activities. For example the DEIS did not fully evaluate or disclose:

- a. How wetlands on site receive and/or process surface and groundwater.
- b. The amount of wetland fill, conversion, or degradation associated with site grading and or installation of cart paths.
- c. The impacts of extensive tree clearing on wetlands and/or site hydrology.
- e. The potential for shallow groundwater pumping to cause a drawdown in wetland water levels.
- f. The potential for curbs and gutters along fairways near wetlands to disconnect wetlands from their water source.

Answering these and similar questions will require a detailed understanding of both site topography and hydrology. The most cost effective way to gather detailed and accurate information on site topography and surface water flow-paths is through photo-interpretation of LiDar imagery (available through Sheboygan County). For somewhere between \$2,000 - \$5,000 you could have an experienced wetland photo-interpreter assess drainage patterns and evaluate potential indirect impacts of proposed activities in or near wetlands. Due to the specialized expertise required, we recommend requiring Kohler to subcontract with the GeoSpatial Services Center (<http://www.geospatialservices.org/>) at St. Mary's University of Minnesota to perform this analysis.

3. The proposed project purpose is too broad and the need for the project is not well supported.

The basic project purpose is to build a golf course. Proximity to the lake front is desired, but is not germane to the basic project purpose.

While aspects of the design appear to be driven by an intent to host professional golf tournaments, the DEIS does not include evidence of a demand for additional PGA tournament sites. Further, it fails to describe what design elements are required to meet PGA standards (i.e., fairway length and width, topography, visitor facilities, etc.).

This information should be disclosed as it is relevant to the project need and the sponsor's ability to modify the site plans to avoid or minimize impacts to wetlands and other sensitive resources.

4. The decision to initiate the WEPA review without federal NEPA coordination is atypical and inefficient for the applicant, the coordinating agencies, and the concerned public.

Projects of this magnitude generally trigger a joint environmental review between state and federal agencies. The scoping and drafting for the environmental impact statement typically does not begin until *after* submission of a relatively complete application. The benefits of this approach are that all agencies with jurisdiction have the ability to review a project plan and to request information that can be reviewed in decision making and disclosed to the public.

The public benefits from the disclosure of the technical questions and comments produced by professional agency staff. Wisconsin Wetlands Association tends to rely heavily on correspondence between agencies and applicants to inform our response to controversial projects. The absence of these materials in the project record increased our workload and the difficulty of our DEIS review.

The decision to move forward with a public comment period prior to completion of a federally led archaeological review and tribal coordination is also non-conventional and inefficient as the findings are likely to result in additional, and potentially significant, changes to site design.

For all of the reasons stated above, we find the DEIS for the proposed Kohler golf course to be highly deficient.

We respectfully request that the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources require the project sponsor to submit extensive additional site plan information and to pay for additional analysis to be completed by independent contractor(s). We ask that these requests for information be coordinated with federal agencies and released in a Supplemental DEIS with a full 60-day comment period.

Given the many financial constraints of the Department, we also strongly suggest that no additional review or analysis be completed unless or until the project sponsor submits a complete application to both the Wisconsin DNR and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and that all future work be fully coordinated between the two agencies.

We thank you for your consideration of these comments on the Draft EIS for this proposed project.

Regards,



Erin O'Brien
Policy Director